



Survey examines first responders health care costs

SA Chamber releases survey on citizens' opinions

By Stephanie Serna, Reporter

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The cost of health care for police and firefighters and whether or not they should be asked to pay an increased share of their cost is a hot issue on the table when it comes to the city budget.

On Thursday, the San Antonio Chamber of Commerce released its findings from a community survey they privately funded, to find out what the public thinks.

The results from the survey conducted last month show that 57 percent of 500 randomly selected registered voters favor police and firefighters paying a percentage of their monthly health care premiums.

"I think our results are solid," said Richard Perez, CEO of the San Antonio Chamber of Commerce. "They are very eye-opening, as far as we are concerned, but I think it is a clear indication of where our community is today."

Some of the information given to those who took the survey, included a statement about how health care costs range from \$19,122 per uniformed employee in San Antonio to \$3,575 per employee in Dallas.

In response, Chief Christopher Steele, president of the San Antonio Professional Firefighters Association, said to call only 500 people and ask them a question he calls misleading, only creates a misleading response.

"We really feel like the questions were wrong," said Steele. "The method was wrong. There wasn't enough people. Overwhelmingly, 90 plus percent say that they support us maintaining the current health care we have."

As it stands now, police and firefighters have to pay a deductible.

However, some residents we talked to Thursday say they think police and firefighters should pay those premiums too.

"It's going to help everybody in the end," said San Antonio resident Stephanie Martinez. "So, honestly, I think it's more about money."

According to the fact sheet issued by the San Antonio Chamber of Commerce, the city would save about \$15 million per year if fire and police personnel were provided the same coverage as non-uniformed city employees.

However Steele said that the city could save that money by not spending it on new fire stations and buildings.

Perez said the San Antonio Chamber of Commerce will not announce their position on the issue until they meet with police and firefighters, which should happen sometime next week.